



Renfrew County and District Health Unit

"Optimal Health for All in Renfrew County and District"

Medical Officer of Health Report to the Board

Tuesday, October 31st, 2023

Health Promotion

Drug-related Deaths and Overdoses

Drug-related deaths and harms are increasing in Renfrew County and District. This month, we released an overdose alert with partners following an increase in overdoses and suspected overdose-related deaths. This recent increase is in the context of a year during which we have already been seeing elevated rates of drug-related harms.

From January 1st, 2023, to October 18th, 2023, there were 31 suspect drug-related deaths, or approximately 3 deaths per month. Prior to the pandemic, there was an average of 1 suspect drug-related death per month, so this is an approximately three-fold increase. In recent months, an increasing proportion of deaths have involved people experiencing homelessness.

In response to the increase in drug-related deaths, we are having frequent information sharing meetings with partners and adapting our approach as appropriate. We are also collaborating with local partners, including Renfrew County Paramedics and Community Services, to continue improving the effectiveness of our response to the opioid crisis. A mobile response unit is being planned to increase the accessibility of health and social services. We will support this initiative with a focus on maximizing access to harm reduction services.

Opioids continue to be involved in most drug-related deaths; however, polysubstance-use is increasingly involved. All street drugs must be considered potentially toxic and fatal. Friends, family members, and individuals who use drugs can reduce risk by carrying naloxone, avoiding drug-use alone, not mixing drugs, and calling the [National Overdose Response Service](#) if there is no other choice but to use alone. Our [RCDHU harm reduction web page](#) has more information, as well as an anonymous overdose reporting form.

We are deeply saddened by the impact of the opioid crisis on our communities and are dedicated to continued collaborative efforts to minimize drug-related illness and death.

Health Promotion Staff Education

In alignment with our strategic goal of increasing workforce capacity, the health promotion division is training staff in Trauma-and-Violence-Informed Care and Anti-Stigma.

Trauma-and-Violence-Informed-Care:

Trauma and violence-informed approaches are policies and practices that recognize the connections between violence, trauma, negative health outcomes, and behaviours. These approaches increase safety, control, and resilience for people who are seeking services in relation to experiences of violence and/or have a history of experiencing violence.

Staff are currently completing the following courses offered through the University of British Columbia's e-learning program:

- A) [Trauma- and Violence-Informed Care \(TVIC\) Foundations](#)
- B) [Trauma- and Violence-Informed Care \(TVIC\) Public Health Nurse Home Visiting & Outreach Curriculum](#)

Anti-Stigma:

Fear and misunderstanding often lead to prejudice against people with mental illness and addictions, even among health service providers. This prejudice and discrimination can lead to feelings of hopelessness and shame in those struggling to cope with their situation, creating a serious barrier to accessing services.

Taking positive steps towards addressing stigma includes increasing staff's knowledge about stigma and learning about practical strategies that they can put into practice daily.

Staff are completing a series of courses and readings through the Registered Nurses Association of Ontario (RNAO) and the [Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction \(CCSA\)](#).

- A) [Mental Health and Substance Use: What is Stigma?](#)
- B) [Overcoming Stigma: Online Learning](#)
- C) [RNAO Best Practice Guideline: Engaging Clients Who Use Substances](#)
- D) [Engaging Clients Who Use Substances](#)

Healthy Babies, Healthy Children Program

The Healthy Babies Healthy Children (HBHC) home visiting program is an early intervention program for families confirmed through screening and assessment as being with risk of compromised child development. This voluntary program provides families in the prenatal period and families with children from birth until their transition to school with opportunities to achieve their full potential.

The HBHC Program intends to optimize growth and development and reduce health inequities. The Program components include.

- system integration,
- access to information and resources,

- early identification and intervention,
- assessments,
- service coordination,
- referral to community services,
- research and evaluation

Our HBHC team includes public health nurses, a home visitor, and social workers.

Clients may access our services through self-referrals or professional referrals. RCDHU continues its partnership with Pembroke Regional Hospital to enable HBHC Public Health Nurses meet with new families prior to discharge from hospital.

To date, HBHC team members have:

1. Visited with **280** families in hospital prior their discharge.
2. Reached **401** new families in the postpartum period through telephone calls to clients in Renfrew County and District.
3. Received **243** referrals to the HBHC Program.
4. Engaged with families over the course of **1133** home visits.

Health Protection

Healthy Environments

The Yellow Ribbon Campaign was undertaken by RCDHU to educate the public about injury prevention and rabies animal bite safety. The campaign encouraged dog owners to identify their pets with a yellow ribbon so that others would steer clear or ask the dog owner for permission to touch the dog. RCDHU offered local businesses and veterinary clinics yellow ribbons and postcards, encouraging them to support the campaign by providing the ribbons free of charge to their clients. We partnered with 11 retail pet food stores, one animal shelter/rescue service, and seven veterinary clinics. The campaign was promoted across Renfrew County and District.

Based on media analytics, it is the third highest performing social media post in 2023 (overdose alert and air quality media releases were the top two). This was a successful campaign that gained positive feedback online. We will continue to evaluate the program in terms of engagement and rate of animal bites over time.

Healthy Environments inspectors continue to complete regulatory inspections on food premises, personal service settings, recreational water facilities, small drinking water systems, and infection prevention and control inspections at long-term care and retirement homes.

Immunization (COVID-19, Flu, and RSV)

The first allocations of COVID-19 XBB 1.5 and influenza vaccine were received at RCDHU in the first week of October. Hospitals, long-term care homes, and primary care received

their first shipments of both vaccines in early October to support vaccination of individuals at high risk.

RCDHU has additionally hosted 6 community-based COVID-19 and influenza mass immunization clinics since October 10th. Vaccine uptake at these clinics has been high, with approximately 1600 doses of COVID-19 vaccine and 1400 doses of influenza vaccine administered between October 10th and October 18th. Due to high attendance at recent clinics, all fall COVID-19 and Influenza clinics have transitioned to appointment-based booking moving forward. Information on how to book an appointment can be found [here](#).

RCDHU COVID-19 Vaccine mobile clinics for retirement homes and congregate settings commenced in October. As of October 20th, 4 out of 11 clinics have been completed. Starting October 30th, both COVID-19 and influenza vaccines will be available to the general public. RCDHU will continue offering combined COVID-19 and influenza clinics across RCD. The pharmacy channel will remain another access point for both vaccines.

The Ministry of Health has shared that publicly-funded Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) vaccine will be available for residents of long-term care homes, and some retirement homes this fall. RCDHU will initiate distribution of RSV once implementation materials have been received from the Ministry of Health.

Immunization (General Program)

The RCDHU Immunization team has been supporting ConnectWell Beachburg and Rainbow Valley Community Health Center in hosting Kids Come First immunization clinics. The Kids Come First Health Team launched this pilot vaccination campaign in June 2023 to help children and youth in Eastern Ontario catch up on routine immunizations. To date, two vaccination clinics have occurred, and an additional clinic is scheduled for November 16th, 2023.

The first round of Grade 7 immunization clinics for hepatitis B, meningococcal disease, and human papilloma virus are continuing to occur. As of October 20th, 27 clinics have been completed. School-based clinics are planned for completion by the first week of November.

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